United Nations E/CN.5/1999/NGO/5

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 January 1999

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Thirty-seventh session
9-19 February 1999
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

One of the most challenging demographic trends of the twenty-first century is the growth of the global older population, citizens who are living longer, productive lives. A steady stream of one million persons now crosses the threshold of age 60 every month and 80 per cent of them are in developing countries. By the year 2001, the total number of those aged 60 and above is projected to reach 600 million and go on to reach 1.2 billion by the year 2025. At that time, over 70 per cent of older persons will be living in what are today's developing countries. This demographic revolution will affect the social and economic structures in all societies.

In this 1999 International Year of Older Persons, the Secretary-General has urged that the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (DPI/1261/Rev.1) be widely disseminated and acted upon. These Principles encompass issues of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. For all Governments and civil societies, the foremost challenge lies in identifying and supporting new opportunities for older persons and the benefits for society that arise from viewing older persons as a resource rather than a burden. Older persons have self-reliance and the potential for making contributions to their families and communities and, by means of these contributions, for improving the quality of life for all

* E/CN.5/1999/1

99-01116 (E) 280199

in a sustainable manner. To fulfil this potential, older persons must have access to adequate resources to meet basic needs and must be incorporated into decision-making processes.

Responding to this challenge would ensure implementation of commitment 4 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, which specifically refers to the promotion of social integration by fostering those activities that provide for the full participation of all generations in society. The International Federation on Ageing, with the support of the NGO Committee on Ageing, therefore proposes the following actions to enable persons in their higher years to have full partnership in their communities and in society:

(a) Recognizing that older persons are a valuable and productive resource in every society, Governments and civil society should invest in their elderly. Older persons possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, diverse cultural heritages and life-long experiences which must be utilized to enable societies to accommodate to the unprecedented population shift referred to above. The substantive contributions of older persons taking on responsibilities in their communities and in society can only benefit social development;

(b) Older persons need adequate resources to meet basic needs — namely, accessible health and social services, shelter, adequate income and employment opportunities, including retraining, second careers, and recognition of the value of unpaid as well as paid work, and inclusion in decision-making processes;

(c) Human rights and respect for every person's dignity must be upheld to the very end of the life cycle. Efforts must be directed towards countering negative attitudes and myths regarding ageing, which still persist globally.

The International Federation on Ageing looks to the Commission for Social Development to promote social integration, which, by its very nature implies the full participation and partnership of all generations in "A society for all ages". This theme of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons provides a unique opportunity for Governments and civil society to measure progress in moving towards the objectives stated above.